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## EDUCATION

# University of Maryland receives record number of sexual misconduct reports, conducts few investigations

By Talia Richman  
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Fueled by a rising awareness about the prevalence of sexual violence on campus and ways to report it, the University of Maryland's Title IX office received a record-high number of complaints last school year — yet it opened a record-low number of investigations into those claims.

During the last school year, the Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct received 249 reports of potential sexual misconduct, of which 91 became formalized complaints, according to its recently published [annual report](#). Investigators then opened 16 investigations. The year before, the office fielded 208 reports, of which 80 became complaints, and opened 27 investigations.

During the office's inaugural year, the 2014-2015 academic year, it opened 18 investigations, stemming from 48 complaints and 112 reports. Until last year, the numbers had been climbing steadily in every category.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, experts say it's a positive when the number of sexual misconduct reports rises at a university. Sexual violence, they say, is a severely under-reported crime and an increase in reports likely means more people on the College Park campus are aware of how to come forward.

Andrea Goodwin, who acted as the office's interim co-director after its previous leader resigned in August, [told the university's student newspaper](#) that she could not attribute the low number of investigations to any particular factor.

Her predecessor in the role, Catherine Carroll, repeatedly said that during her tenure the office was under-staffed and under-sourced. She left prior to the start of the current academic year for a job in the Fairfax County school system.

The office has been [under investigation by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights](#) since late 2017 for how it responds to reports of sexual assaults.

In an interview, Goodwin said she does not believe the office was understaffed or that a lack of resources contributed to a lower number of investigations.

"Anytime we get a report, we take it very seriously," she said.

Of the 91 complaints brought forward in the 2017-18 school year, nine resulted in completed investigations, seven investigations are still in progress and eight cases reached an “informal resolution.”

In roughly a third of the cases, the complainant did not want to move forward with the process, and in 16 cases, the university had no authority to investigate. The rest of the complaints stalled for other reasons.

The discrepancy between the number of complaints and investigations worries Ever Hanna, the campus policy manager for End Rape on Campus. The low number of investigations, Hanna said, raises questions about how the Title IX office is operating. That so many didn’t want to proceed makes Hanna wonder whether students distrust the Title IX office.

“I would like to see the numbers be more closely matched,” Hanna said. “To see that only 16 were taken seriously enough to have an investigation is really disappointing.”

Goodwin said each case is individually assessed. For a variety of reasons, she said, a “report doesn’t always turn into a complaint and a complaint doesn’t always turn into an investigation.”

The university’s case-by-case approach was also apparent in the way sanctions were doled out to students found responsible of sexual misconduct.

In one case, the school expelled a person found responsible for Sexual Assault I, which is rape, and Sexual Assault II, which the university defines as “unwanted touching of intimate body parts.”

Another student, meanwhile, was found responsible of Sexual Assault I and II and was suspended, but the suspension was withheld. The student also had to attend an ethics seminar, complete a research paper on affirmative consent and do community service.

Before deciding a sanction, Goodwin says the Title IX office considers a number of factors, including the impact on the victim and whether the person accepts responsibility.

“There are no automatic sanctions,” she said.



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